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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the role of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) textbooks in Hong Kong schools is examined first in social and historical contexts and then within the framework of a newly revised public school curriculum. The textbook is first viewed from three perspectives: curricular (socio-political); instructional (as an educational tool); and economic (as a commodity). Then it is examined in three distinct periods of English language teaching in Hong Kong: classical humanism (1878-1952); reconstructionism (1952-1995) and progressivism (post-1995). The use of textbooks during each of these periods is discussed. It is concluded that in the new Hong Kong educational scheme, published ESL textbooks and complementary materials (workbooks, audio and video tapes) will be an important core instructional resource and reflect progressivist values: durability; flexibility; and economy. Considerations in the design of textbooks and in teacher training in their classroom use and adaptation are also noted. Contains 15 references. (MSE)

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THE FUTURE ROLE OF EFL TEXTBOOK RESOURCES IN HONG KONG

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THE FUTURE ROLE OF EFL TEXTBOOK RESOURCES IN HONG KONG

Bob Adamson and John C.K. Lee

1. Introduction

The teaching and learning of English is about to undergo radical change in Hong Kong. The forthcoming introduction of the Target-Oriented Curriculum (TOC) calls for new approaches to planning and organising learning experiences, and to assessment procedures.

As with all instances of curriculum renewal, the resources that are made available will go a long way to determining the eventual success or failure of TOC. Therefore, it is pertinent to examine a traditional mainstay of language teaching resources, the textbook. What exactly is a textbook? What purposes does it serve? Is there a place in TOC for the textbook? What, if anything, should or can take its place?

In this paper we shall briefly outline the evolution of English language textbooks in Hong Kong within different educational values systems. This historical perspective will inform our discussion concerning the production of suitable resources to support the TOC initiative. We shall try to identify a practical role for textbooks that is compatible with the socio-political, educational and economic forces that shape the design, implementation and enactment of TOC.

2. Theoretical framework

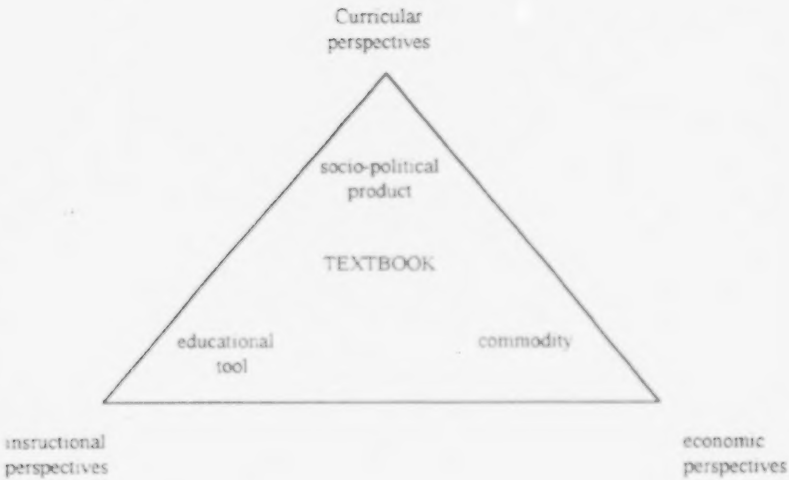
For our investigation of the role of EFL[1] textbooks in Hong Kong, we will adopt a triangular theoretical framework (figure 1). This framework, to which a third, historical, dimension will be added, enables us to examine textbooks as socio-political, educational and economic products.

The three perspectives, socio-political, educational and economic, represent the interests of, respectively, those who plan the curriculum (usually government agencies), those who implement the curriculum (teachers and students), and those who resource the curriculum (principally commercial publishers).

The curriculum in general is laden with socio-political values (Clark 1987), and the English language syllabus in particular is shaped by views about language learning. These values and views will be reflected, to varying degrees of fidelity, by the nature and use of textbooks. In time, values systems have altered and views about language learning have been reassessed. One would expect to find that the nature and use of textbooks have likewise undergone change.

Figure 1

Theoretical framework



'Instruction', in this paper, carries the broad meaning of 'strategies intended to facilitate learning'. The features of textbooks as instructional tools are defined by their contents and the ways they are actually used by teachers and students.

Considering the textbook as a commodity brings economic factors into play. Commercially produced textbooks are subject to market forces which include the profit motive, the laws of supply and demand, the availability of resources (including human resources), and the available technology.

We shall apply the theoretical framework to three periods of English language teaching in Hong Kong. Borrowing from Skilbeck's (1982) labels for Western values systems, we shall label the Hong Kong periods as Classical Humanism, Reconstructionism and Progressivism, as Hong Kong has tended to import its educational reforms from the United Kingdom. The periods will be crudely demarcated as 1878-1952, 1952-1995 and post-1995 respectively. We say 'crudely' because these dates mark significant educational decisions or the commencement of curriculum renewal: there often follows a time-lag before widespread acceptance and implementation of change occurs.

3. Classical Humanism: 1878-1952

In 1878, a Conference on the Teaching of English at Government Schools concluded that the teaching of English should be accorded the highest priority in education (Ng 1984:70). Education in schools that taught English was generally reserved for the elite and wealthy (ibid:69). English language teaching focused on the acquisition of rules about language, accessed through linguistic analysis of literary extracts. The syllabus sequenced language forms from what was perceived to be simple to what was perceived to be difficult. This approach to language education is consistent with the general properties of Classical Humanism which Clark (1987:3) summarises as:

> ... elitist, concerned with the generalizable intellectual capacities and with the transmission of knowledge, culture and standards from one generation to another.

Instruction consisted of the technical implementation of the syllabus, whereby the teacher, as possessor of the appropriate knowledge, divulged it to the students, who used the techniques of memorisation, translation, analysis, classification and reconstruction of given rules and principles to acquire and apply the knowledge. This acquisition was then assessed according to norm-referenced criteria.

Textbooks were employed primarily as source books of culture and language analysis. Typical kinds of textbook would be the reader, incorporating a collection of literary extracts complemented by *explications de texte*, and a grammar book, with rules and exercises. A supplementary writing book, for dictations, calligraphy and elementary composition was also used. The subject matter of lessons, usually taught by teachers with little or no training (Sweeting 1993), would be dictated by the contents of the textbook.

As commodities, these textbooks were usually imported from publishing houses in Britain, such as Macmillan and Company, T. Nelson and Sons and Blackie & Son (Fong 1975:68-74), or occasionally published in Hong Kong through subsidies from missionary organisations or educational authorities. Textbook writers were native speakers, most having no connection to Hong Kong. The size of the market for EFL textbooks, numbering around ten thousand towards the end of the nineteenth century (Ng 1984:163), rendered it an unprofitable proposition for publishing houses.

4. Reconstructionism: 1952-1995

The characteristics of the second values system, Reconstructionism, with its view of education as a dynamic means for egalitarian social reform, mark it as a clear departure from the elitist, conservative tendencies of Classical Humanism. This shift accorded well with the imperative need to develop a workforce for Hong Kong's

growing manufacturing industry in the post-war period. At the same time, the population was swelling rapidly, necessitating an expansion of basic education.

A series of reports addressed the issue of language teaching. The Burney Report (1935) emphasised the need to develop vernacular education at the expense of English, which would be taught for vocational needs. Burney's recommendations could not be implemented until after the Second World War, when a serious reappraisal of education in Hong Kong was made. In 1952, a report on English teaching in schools by a Committee on Higher Education found serious weaknesses and, as a consequence, reforms were undertaken (Bickley 1987). The Llewellyn Report (1982) stressed the importance of 'genuine bilingualism' (Llewellyn et al. 1982:29) and proposed various measures to improve the quantity and quality of education in Hong Kong.

Initially, the form of Reconstructionism was very mild. A move towards egalitarianism was manifested in the improved provision of education, but serious efforts to use education as a means to effect fundamental social change only began after the signing, in 1984, of the Draft Agreement between the People's Republic of China and the United Kingdom concerning the future of Hong Kong (Morris 1992).

The mildness of Hong Kong Reconstructionism, particularly in the post-war period, is especially evident in the contents of EFL textbooks. The Classical Humanist literary texts, with their cultural function, were replaced by dialogues, stories (often simply anecdotes) and passages of general interest. Little attempt was made at consciousness-raising or promoting egalitarianism, even after the watershed of 1984. Present-day textbooks devote occasional pages to social issues such as the environment or the problems of the handicapped, but the principal function of Reconstructionist EFL textbooks has been to promote language learning as an end, rather than as a means to other educational goals.

As with Classical Humanism, the English syllabus is subject-centred, but defined through a synthesis of theory and practice, and implemented through critical enactment, whereby teachers adopted a more active role in the selection of subject matter. In terms of instruction, the rule-based, direct transmission tenets of grammar-translation were replaced by a more pragmatic view of language learning which stressed language use rather than knowledge about language. The goal was for students to achieve communicative competence in oral and written language.

A number of instructional strategies were used, including the Direct Method, Audio-lingualism and Oral-structuralism (Bickley 1987). The scope of EFL textbooks widened to incorporate communicative language serving as a model or a stimulus, with varying degrees of authenticity (Ng 1993), for communicative output by learners.

The textbook, as a static, writing-based, two-dimensional medium has severe limitations for the purpose of focusing on communicative language in its diverse oral, aural, and visual manifestations. These limitations were eased by technological

innovations, resulting in the development of a wide range of aural and audio-visual resources. One might have expected that the place of the textbook as the central resource in language learning be threatened by such technological advances. However, a recent study (Richards, Tung and Ng 1992) shows that teachers in Hong Kong rely heavily on textbooks as their principal instructional tool.

We would suggest three principal reasons for the dominance of textbooks over other forms of resources. The first is the weight of tradition: the book has historically been the central learning resource. The second reason is the permanence and convenience offered by the book as a printed, centralised and portable collection of materials. Thirdly, as a commodity, textbooks command a larger market and are less prone to illegal copying than resources such as cassette and video tapes.

With the growth in population, the market for textbooks increased considerably during the Reconstructionist period, resulting in the establishment of local and international publishing houses in Hong Kong. The lack of experienced, professional textbook writers has been overcome by commissioning overseas textbook writers, language specialists employed by the Education Department and academics in local tertiary institutions to produce materials. More recently, measures to strengthen language education and teacher education have enabled publishers to engage expatriate and - a notable departure - local Chinese teachers in Hong Kong as EFL textbook writers.

Quality control of textbooks is carried out by a committee under the auspices of the Education Department, which requires publishers to submit all textbooks for approval.

5. Progressivism: post-1995

Throughout the eighties, much of Hong Kong's manufacturing base emigrated to Guangdong and other parts of south-east Asia. As a result, Hong Kong developed information-based and service industries to fill the void. At the same time, rapid technological advances, most notably computerisation, and the globalization of trade, including tourism, created a demand for a highly skilled and linguistically competent workforce.

Recent political movements experienced particularly in Western countries, such as democratisation, human rights issues, and equality for all sectors of a population, have also been echoed in Hong Kong. These trends in Hong Kong have grown from its political, economic and communication links to the West, improved educational and living standards, and sensitivity in relation to its hand-over to the People's Republic of China in 1997.

As a consequence of these global changes, and of the development of new theories of learning, Hong Kong plans to adopt a Progressivist approach to the

curriculum in 1995, in the form of the Target-Oriented Curriculum (formerly known as Targets and Target-Related Assessment).

Progressivism focuses on the needs of an individual as an intellectual, emotional and social being. Unlike Classical Humanism or Reconstructionism, it is essentially learner- and learning-centred. It does not envisage the 'top-down' transmission of a value-laden, subject-centred curriculum as its chief *raison d'être*. Instead,

> [k]nowledge is not seen as a set of fixed facts, but as a creative problem-solving capacity that depends upon an ability to retrieve appropriate schemata from a mental store, to utilize whatever can be automatically brought to bear upon a situation, and to bend existing conceptual structures to the creation of novel concepts that offer a working solution to the particular problem in hand. (Clark 1987:50-51)

Progressivism is realised in language teaching and learning through task-based programmes such as those pioneered by Prabhu in the Bangalore Project (Prabhu and Carroll 1980). As with Reconstructionist approaches, it stresses the communicative nature of language learning. However, there are two important differences.

Firstly, Progressivism does not view language learning as an end in itself. Rather, it holds that language is learnt *for*, and *through*, personal growth. It follows that the English syllabus does not consist merely of language items or concepts graded according to the perception of whether they are 'easy' or 'difficult'. Instead, it aligns a unified spiralling progression of cognitive goals and targets relating to the language contents, processes and products. The individual tasks are thematically linked in units, which, in turn, form part of a unified module. Assessment takes the form of criterion-referencing against holistic communicative targets.

Secondly, it is the TOC tasks, chosen to match the needs and interests of the specific group of learners, that determine the lexical, grammatical and other linguistic elements that learners will need, whereas formerly it was the language syllabus that determined the exponential communicative tasks.

Progressivist instruction follows the mutual adaptation model, which means that teachers and learners take most of the responsibility for the choice, design and conduct of learning experiences. Many of the experiences involve pair work, group work and individual work on projects and tasks, although supporting language-focused exercises and practice allow for some teacher-centred teaching. Another feature of instruction is learner-independence in selecting their own paths of learning and use of English.

The learner-centred approach, in which instruction caters to individual needs and interests, has important implications for the future of EFL textbooks. To date, textbooks, whether Classical Humanist or Reconstructionist, have carried a graded language syllabus, tailored, in many cases, for particular groups of students (such

as those in Band 1 schools, for instance). The learner-centred TOC syllabus, on the other hand, envisages courses with sophisticated cognitive and linguistic grading criteria, designed for much smaller groups, or even individuals. Clearly, then, subject-centred textbooks designed for a general market are incompatible with learning-oriented methods that cater to the individual needs of learners.

Richards (1993), who was not referring specifically to the Hong Kong situation, identifies three other ways in which the use of commercially produced textbooks might have a negative impact, namely:

- the lack of local content
- the reification of textbooks
- the deskilling of teachers

The lack of local content may not, at first glance, be considered an important issue for Hong Kong, which occupies such a relatively small geographical area. However, within the territory, there is actually considerable diversity in terms of locality and social background of learners; this diversity is seldom addressed in textbooks produced 'for the Hong Kong market.'

Reification of textbooks, whereby teachers ascribe a superior status to them, is inappropriate in a learner-centred culture. TOC emphasises the central role of teachers as course designers in meeting the specific needs and interests of learners. It follows, therefore, that if teachers abdicate their decision-making role in favour of relying on the textbook, they are deskilled and play a lesser part in the instructional process.

Theoretically, therefore, it would appear that textbooks are too clumsy an instructional tool for a Progressivist values system. Ideally, they would be replaced by teacher- or even learner-produced modular resources that match the needs and interests of individual learners, or, at most, small groups of learners. Indeed, there has recently been a rapid growth internationally in resource books for teachers, comprising 'recipes' or suggested activities on which teachers can draw when constructing schemes of work.

Therefore, if TOC to be implemented according to its theoretical ideals, there is a need for teachers to act as materials designers and producers. What is not clear is the current circumstances of teachers in Hong Kong permit them to fulfil this function.

Although much excellent work is done in some schools in materials preparation, the study by Richards, Tung and Ng (1992) found that less than one third of the teachers surveyed made significant use of self-prepared materials. Several reasons for this may be proposed.

Firstly, the Chinese Neo-Confucian tradition favours a text-based approach to language study. This tradition could influence not only teachers, but also parents and students. Secondly, Education Commission Report Number 4 reveals that 46% of primary and 44% of secondary English teachers are not subject-trained (Education Commission 1990), which would explain a predisposition amongst such teachers towards textbook-dependence. (Cf. 1991 figures reported by Tsui in Coniam et al. in this volume: editor's note.) Thirdly, large classes of around forty students and a heavy teaching load reduce the available time for materials preparation.

Furthermore, there are potential difficulties with 'in-house' teacher-produced resources. Quality control presents a major problem. Not all teachers can be expected to have the necessary creativity, linguistic competence and instructional design skills: nor is there any guarantee that teacher-produced resources will automatically be more successful than commercial resources.

Schools do not have the printing or reproduction facilities to produce attractive materials of a professional standard, nor the capacity to cope with the large amount of production work that would arise if all departments were attempting to create their own materials. Another drawback would be that the wheel would be re-invented on numerous occasions unless an effective mechanism existed to allow schools to share their materials.

One solution might be to encourage publishers to produce a wide range of individual modules in booklet form, from which teachers could select or adapt suitable materials to form a coherent course for their particular circumstances. However, to produce these booklets with textbook-standard artwork, paper and editorial input would incur a higher unit cost than the larger-scale textbook. Booklets would also be more vulnerable to illegal photocopying, thus reducing sales and increasing prices.

6. The Future Role of Textbook Resources

We believe that published textbook resources offer a viable solution to the problem of resourcing the TOC. The term 'textbook resources' represents the nature of EFL instructional materials since Reconstructionist times. It refers not only to the textbook that forms the core of the materials, but also to the complementary resources, such as workbooks, audio cassette and video tapes, that are necessary because of the complex nature of language learning.

There are three principal reasons why published textbook resources still have a role to play in a Progressivist values system: durability, flexibility and economy.

To date, the textbook as core instructional material has proved to have qualities of endurance in resisting challenges from other forms of resources, and to be adaptable in times of educational change. The nature of the post-war EFL textbook made the transition from providing a collection of literary texts to serving as an

eclectic language resource, despite being ill-fitted to convey the oral medium of communication. The economic advantages of the textbook, which contribute in large part to its enduring quality, are reinforced by the reified status accorded to textbooks by teachers, which, although educationally undesirable, promotes confidence among learners, teachers and parents in its use.

To allow flexibility in the use of textbook resources, two important criteria need to be met. Firstly, the textbook resources must be carefully designed and written to reflect the basic tenets of TOC. Secondly, teacher education should seek to enskill teachers to handle textbooks in ways appropriate to individual learning situations.

Progressivist textbook resources would consist of several modules. The modules should be free-standing, but, taken together, would form a coherent series to cover an individual keystage of TOC. The approach, following TOC principles would be thematic, in that the tasks would dictate the language syllabus and not, as previously, *vice versa*. The modules would be graded in terms of cognitive and linguistic demands upon learners. However, there would be scope for adaptation by teachers, so that modules would not necessarily have to be followed in a predetermined order.

The materials would comprise a core textbook, supported by complementary resources. With the socio-political emphasis on whole-person, experiential learning, the materials in the core textbook would include experiential text, intended to promote whole-person response, as well as offering the wherewithal to create holistic learning experiences in the form of tasks.

The complementary resources would have two functions. The first would be to create alternative experiences through a different medium. This would involve the provision of video and audio cassette tapes, or whatever hardware and software may arise from technological developments. The second function would be to cater for individual differences in learners, by providing remedial, supporting and extension work through language and skills-centred exercises.

Experiential texts, in a range of oral, visual and written genres, would pursue the Progressivist principle of language learning *for* and *through* personal growth by engaging the learner in critical reflection on cross-curricular political, social, intellectual and emotional issues: EFL textbook resources would no longer be permitted to adopt the isolationist stance of language learning for its own sake. Textbook resources hold an advantage over teacher-produced resources, in that researching suitable cross-curricular materials and producing high-quality resources are very time-consuming and expensive operations. Comprehensive support for teachers should also be provided, so that the textbook and other resources also perform a teacher education function. Once again, the form of teacher education provided by the textbook resources must be consistent with the tenets of Progressivism: teachers should be encouraged to become reflective practitioners. Notes for teachers could include sample teaching plans and advice on methodology, as well as background information about cultural and linguistic matters likely to

arise. They should also present ways of adapting the materials to meet individual needs.

Formal pre-service and in-service teacher education must prepare teachers to be careful selectors and adaptors of published materials. The choice of textbook resources is a crucial decision, requiring informed opinions. Teachers can be introduced to selection criteria, such as the *Catalyst* checklist (Grant 1987).

Teacher education programmes can equip teachers to use the textbook resources in three different ways. Firstly, teachers could adopt the textbook resources for class use uncritically. Although far from ideal, such use would ensure that the learners have access to good quality and well-structured resources, whilst providing support and education for teachers who are, initially at least, inexperienced, unqualified or unable for other reasons to play a more active role in materials design.

At the other end of the spectrum, teachers could be enskilled to manage without textbook resources and be responsible for their own materials production. In these circumstances, the textbook resources are not used in the classroom, but made available in a resource centre. The modules would then serve as exemplars for the teachers.

The third use would see the textbook resources adopted for classwork, but the contents would be adapted, omitted or replaced as necessary by the teacher to match the needs and interests of the learners. This solution would allow teachers to use their professional skills, whilst, at the same time, releasing them from the total burden of materials production.

In economic terms, publishers would relish the prospect of a large potential student market[2] that the continued use of textbook resources would permit. One benefit would be high standards of production that the lower unit costs of textbooks allow. To ensure that textbook resources meet the specific needs of the Hong Kong market (or, preferably, individual sectors of that market) publishers should continue recent trends by encouraging participation by local teachers in all stages of planning, writing and producing textbook resources.

At the same time, quality control is an essential factor if textbook resources are to fulfil their role adequately. These resources must be worthy of the confidence placed in them by learners, parents and teachers. Publishers need to ensure that high standards of design and instructional content are maintained. One way to achieve this would be to have drafts of the materials reviewed by consultants, including curriculum specialists and experienced materials writers, as well as teachers and learners. The Education Department's role in controlling the quality of textbooks should also continue and be strengthened, thus making sure that textbooks adhere to the principles of language learning according to the philosophy and framework of TOC.

7. Conclusion

The planned introduction of the learner- and learning-centred Target-Oriented Curriculum in Hong Kong in 1995 threatens generalist, subject-based textbook resources with extinction. This paper suggests that a role still exists for EFL textbook resources within TOC. Such resources would typically be:

- task-based, organised thematically
- graded according to cognitive and linguistic principles
- experiential, using texts that promote whole-person growth
- teacher-educational, promoting reflective practices
- produced with the involvement of local teachers

The continued use of textbook resources would provide incentives to two key stakeholders in curriculum renewal: teachers and publishers. For teachers who view the role of materials producer with trepidation, published textbook resources offer solace, by entrusting resource production to those with a creative streak and the time and energy to commit to such projects. Publishers, with continued access to a large market, would be empowered to produce well-made commodities which, thanks to appropriate quality control procedures, would constitute high-quality instructional tools.

As such, Progressivist textbook resources represents a compromise between theoretical socio-political idealism and practical educational and economic realism.

Notes

1 EFL = English as a foreign language. A discussion whether English is learnt in Hong Kong as a *foreign* or a *second* language is beyond the scope of this paper.

2 Currently there are approximately 100,000 primary students and 80,000 secondary students in Hong Kong.

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